

TittleTattle



HIGH-T WITH...

Alison McEwan & Warrick Ross

WITH ROYAL APPROVAL, THE HONG KONG ESCAPE RE-ENACTMENT ORGANISATION (HERO) RETRACE THEIR FATHERS' DARING WORLD WAR II ESCAPE THIS CHRISTMAS

TITTLE TATTLE: *There are 100 descendants of the 68 escapees taking part in the re-enactment. How did you all get in touch?*

WARRICK ROSS: Ten years ago, I googled "one-legged admiral" and this site (www.hongkongescape.org) came up with a photo of the escape group and there was my dad's face. I typed an email to [site creator] Richard Hide and suddenly all these connections started up. So, if it weren't for technology, we wouldn't know each other. Richard's website has allowed us – one by one – to discover the other descendants.

TT: *How much of the escape route will you retrace?*

ALISON MCEWAN: We will go by boat from Aberdeen around Ap Lei Chau and then we will make our way to Waichow in China – in small stages. We have linked up with the Chinese Cultural Global Foundation and they are

arranging special permits. And it's a happy coincidence that this is the 68th anniversary and they were a party of 68.

TT: *How did you get Prince Philip's support?*

AM: I remembered that in our family photographs there was a photo of my dad – who was Hong Kong's director of physical education – being presented to Prince Phillip. I thought there's no way Prince Phillip will remember but I sent some information to his equerry about our re-enactment. I got a very nice letter back from him wishing us all the best with our venture and a side note from his equerry saying that Prince Phillip was particularly interested because, as a young naval officer, he had been present at the surrender of the Japanese at the end of the war in Hong Kong.

TT: *What message do you want to spread with the re-enactment?*

PATHS OF GLORY

On Christmas Day, 1941, Hong Kong fell to the Japanese. But as Governor Mark Young surrendered to Lieutenant General Takashi Sakai, a motley crew of 68 officers and officials, led by the diminutive one-legged Admiral Chan Chak, performed one of WWII's most daring escapes. From a car chase in Central and swimming to Ap Lei Chau under enemy fire, to dodging warships on their way to Huizhou, their journey, which ended 5,000 km away in Burma on Valentine's Day 1941, is the stuff of legend. An exhibition about the escape will run from this Christmas Day at the Museum of Coastal Defence. hk.coastaldefence.museum



AM: Sino-British cooperation.

The escape wouldn't have been possible without the help of the Chinese villagers and any single one of those very poor peasants could have sold the information. For a lot of the British people at the time, there was still a lot of colonial prejudice. But it was a small Chinese man who ensured the whole party's safety. We're thanking the Chinese people for helping our fathers. If they hadn't been there, we certainly wouldn't be here now.

WR: If it hadn't been for the admiral my father wouldn't have made it out. But if it weren't for others, the admiral wouldn't have made it out. Admiral Chan told that to his son, Donald. Similarly, without the admiral, who had all of the connections in China and the bodyguard who spoke Hakka, they wouldn't have survived.